

**Autumn Ridge Church  
Position on Divorce and Remarriage  
November 18, 2004**

**God's plan for marriage**

Marriage was the first human institution that God ordained. Jesus, when speaking to the Pharisees said, "Haven't you read that at the beginning the Creator 'made them male and female,' and said, 'For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh'? So they are no longer two, but one. Therefore what God has joined together, let man not separate" (Matthew 19:4). When a man and a woman are joined in marriage they become one physically and spiritually. We therefore uphold the sanctity of marriage in a lost and fallen world.

**Divorce, the result of "hardened hearts"**

Becoming a Christian does not erase the earthly consequences of sin. Although we are becoming more like Christ, we may still suffer from emotional pain, personality defects, and sinful habits that are linked to our fallen nature. As a result, our marriages can be stressed and badly wounded, even to the point of being destroyed.

Divorce was not part of God's original plan (Matt. 19:8). Although the Law of Moses permitted a man to divorce his wife when she was found "displeasing to him because he finds something indecent about her" (Deut. 24:1), Jesus taught that divorce was allowed only because our "hearts were hard". God knows we are sinful and that is the only reason He allowed divorce. . The prophet Malachi tells us that God hates divorce (Malachi 2:16). Therefore, as Christians, we should have the same attitude toward divorce as God does and as a church we must strive to strengthen marriages.

**The Bible allows Christians to divorce only under certain circumstances**

Believers are to strive for unity in their marriage even when there are differences of opinions and desires. Divorce rarely solves a problem and is always destructive to families and relationships. There are certain conditions under which Christians are allowed to divorce. One is when a spouse is guilty of *porneia*. Porneia refers to a variety of sexual activity including adultery, homosexuality, bestiality and incest (Matthew 5:32, 19:9, I Corinthians 5:1). The Apostle Paul taught that when a non-believer refuses to live with their believing spouse, particularly because of his or her Christian faith, divorce is allowable) but a believer should not initiate a divorce from an unbelieving spouse who is willing to continue their marriage relationship (I Corinthians 7:12-16).

If two believers have divorced and the one initiating the divorce subsequently repents, it is assumed that both parties will seek reconciliation. With appropriate forgiveness, they can once again enjoy their God ordained union. But, if one has remarried before reconciliation can occur, the first marriage cannot be reinstated. Fortunately, the grace of God becomes operative when there is repentance and confession regardless of the circumstances.

Many issues surrounding divorce are not specifically addressed in scripture. At times circumstances are complex and involve physical and emotional abuse, marital rape or emotional neglect or abandonment. If considering divorce because of situations such as these, a person should seek counsel from pastoral staff who can help them apply the wisdom and intent of scripture to their specific circumstances.

### **Divorce before becoming a Christian**

When we accept Christ as our savior and turn our life over to him, we become a new creation and God's grace and forgiveness covers all sin, including a prior divorce. From the point of our conversion forward, we are to live a life pleasing to God. If divorced and remarried before accepting Christ, God expects us to make our current marriage pleasing to him, just as if we had never been married before. Our conversion does not erase the consequences of our past actions though, and a previous divorce may have significant physically and emotional effects on one's current marriage.

### **Divorce and leadership**

All members in the church are subject to evaluation before being considered for a leadership position. If divorce is part of a Christian's past, they are not disqualified from leadership. But, if considered for leadership they must be truly repentant of all past sins, including those associated with divorce. If divorced and remarried, their current marriage must be pleasing to God, as is required of any person being considered for a leadership position.

### **Remarriage after divorce**

The Bible makes provisions for remarriage after divorce. Nonetheless, there may be restrictions on remarriage depending on the circumstances. The Apostle Paul infers that if a Christian has been divorced and feels they can remain unmarried they should do so (I Corinthians 7:11). Christians who are unmarried and satisfied remaining that way have a unique opportunity to serve in God's kingdom. But please take note, a divorced person who is no longer in a marriage relationship must maintain sexual purity, just as anyone else not married. Any sexual relationship outside of marriage is sin.

### **Marrying a divorced person**

Divorced persons are not "second class Christians." Many of us have past sins that affect our present lives, even though we have been forgiven because of Christ's death and resurrection. But, the Bible cautions Christians who are considering marriage to someone who has been divorced. Strictly speaking, if the divorce was not on biblical grounds, they will commit adultery by marrying the divorced person (Matthew 5:32, Mark 10:11-12). If a Christian is considering marrying someone who has been divorced, they should seek counsel with pastoral staff to discuss their specific circumstances. A pastor can help them understand what the Bible has to say about their decision. Be aware that there may be practical considerations of marrying a person who has been divorced; it is likely that their previous marriage will affect the new marriage relationship in some way.

### **Summary**

God intends for those of us called to marriage to work on our marriage and remain married. In some circumstances divorce is allowed. If a Christian is divorced but it is not possible for them to reconcile with their spouse, remarriage may be acceptable, depending on the circumstances. Having been divorced and/or remarried does not preclude one from leadership positions at Autumn Ridge Church provided any sins associated with the divorce and remarriage have been repented of and appropriately dealt with.